

CYNTHIA AXNE
3RD DISTRICT, IOWA

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
INVESTOR PROTECTION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND CAPITAL MARKETS
HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
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September 8, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
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Martha Williams
Principal Deputy Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
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Charles Wooley
Regional Director
5600 American Blvd W., Ste 990
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Secretary Haaland, Principal Deputy Director Williams, and Regional Director Wooley,

I write today in response to a number of concerns I have heard from my constituents regarding the repairs of the Coulthard Levee, which, along with the Vanman Levee, serve as critical flood protection for Southwest Iowans. These two levees protect roughly 30,000 acres of farmland, many of my constituent's homes, and portions of Interstate 29 from flooding along the Missouri River.

As you may know, my constituents experienced a historic flood in the spring of 2019 that devastated farmland, destroyed homes and businesses, and resulted in millions of damages that we are still fighting to recover from. The two levees, while separate entities, work as a system necessary to protect the lives and livelihood of my constituents. While I understand repairs are underway to restore the proper height for the Vanman Levee, I have heard numerous concerns over an issue that is preventing the Coulthard Levee from being repaired and built to the necessary height in order to adequately protect Iowans.

The Coulthard Levee District seeks to repair the levee to the original height of 1005.5 feet above sea level and has received a grant from the State of Iowa to conduct the repairs. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is preventing the work from being carried out and has issued a "Cease and Desist" letter to stop the repairs. While I understand there are disagreements between the Levee District and FWS on what the original height of the levee was, and therefore what it should be rebuilt to, the levee sponsors – who have maintained the levee for generations – have significant evidence that the levee was originally built at the height of 1005.5 feet.

As Iowans still work to recover and repair the damages from the historic 2019 floods, we must not allow bureaucratic red tape to stand in the way of protecting Iowans from future flooding. Timely repairs of our levee system is not only of the upmost importance to protect my constituents, but the grant from the State of Iowa expires at the end of this year and the difficulties with the FWS threaten the community's ability to finance this important work.

I respectfully encourage your offices to work diligently and quickly with the representatives of the Coulthard Levee to resolve this issue and to allow the levee to be repaired at the adequate height in order to protect my constituents from future flooding. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress